

Announcer:

The Art of Leadership Network.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Welcome to the Carey Nieuwhof Leadership Podcast. It's Carey here, and I hope our time together today helps you thrive in life in leadership. Today, I am sitting down with Chris Anderson. He is the head of TED. If you've ever watched a TED Talk, probably the reason is Chris Anderson. He acquired the company over 20 years ago. We talk about that, turned it into what we all know as TED today. And we are going to cover a lot of things like why and how ideas spread behind the scenes on their massive growth, how TED got rejected by network television. And also, for those of you who are communicators, I ask Chris for his advice for preachers and communicators. So, today's episode is brought to you by the Art of Leadership Academy's Pastoral Succession Toolkit. You can get my brand new value-packed training, which includes super practical salary negotiation tips for free.

If you're thinking about a transition in ministry or have just gone through one in the last few years, go to successiontoolkit.com, and it's brought to you by He Gets Us. You can go to hegetsuspartners.com/fans today to get your free resources and join the over 15,000 churches who are also a part of this movement. Well, I was thrilled to get Chris Anderson on the podcast. He is the curator of TED, which is a nonprofit media organization that leverages the power of ideas to make a better future. He was born in 1957. He spent most of his early life in Pakistan, India, and Afghanistan. In 1985, he launched Future Publishing, which ultimately expanded to more than 130 magazines and 1,500 employees. We touched on that briefly. In 2001, he took over leadership of the TED Conference, and I highly recommend, we'll link to it in the show notes, a talk that he gave to the people who were invested in TED back in 2001, 2002.

It is a brilliant vision casting talk. Under his stewardship though, it became what it is today. Over 3,600 talks and animated lessons have been released for free on the TED website, more than 100,000 on YouTube. He's the author of the New York Times bestseller TED Talks, and is overseeing the introduction of TEDx, TED-Ed, TED Fellows, and The Audacious Project, a new form of collaborative philanthropy. He's a founding partner of Countdown, "A global initiative to champion and accelerate solutions to the climate crisis, turning ideas into action." So man, this is a really, really cool conversation. We also get into his background as a missionary kid growing up, and Christianity, and his faith, and what he misses about that, if anything. So, thanks so much for tuning in. Hey, some of you are brand new. Welcome. For those of you who are listening regularly, thank you so much for subscribing, for leaving ratings and reviews. It means a lot to us.

And whether you like to hear it or not, the truth is that every pastor is an interim pastor, and sooner or later, there's going to be a leadership handoff for a church to remain healthy and growing. I've been through it. You will be through it too, or maybe you're in it right now or have gone through it. So if you're preparing for an upcoming transition, you're in the process, or have gone through one in the last five years, I recently teamed up with Sean Morgan to create the Pastoral Succession Toolkit. The toolkit is a perfect fit for incoming pastors, board members, and guys like me, outgoing pastors, who are two years pre-transition to five years post-transition. When you sign up, you're going to get two live workshops with me, Sean, and other transitioning pastors to work through some of your toughest transition questions together. You'll get a comprehensive checklist that outlines key milestones, decisions, and goals, both pre- and post-handoff.

And as a bonus, a super practical salary negotiation tip for everybody who is looking to negotiate their salary. If this sounds helpful, it's free. Go to successiontoolkit.com to get everything I just mentioned. It's free. That's successiontoolkit.com. So, Super Bowl Sunday is coming up, and we all know people that will

be watching not just for the game but also for the ads. Well, did you know that He Gets Us, which has been now a partner for almost a year of this podcast will be running ads during this year's big game. The ads will reach thousands of new people across the country with a message of Jesus relevance to our daily lives. It's an opportunity for you to listen and respond well. The question is, are you ready? So, head on over to hegetsuspartners.com/fans and you'll be able to download resources like a party pamphlet and a discussion guide so you'll be ready. That's hegetsuspartners.com/fans. Make sure you check it out before the Super Bowl. Well, now, my conversation with Chris Anderson. Chris, welcome to the podcast.

Chris Anderson:

Thank you. It's great to be here.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I have been anticipating this conversation for a long time, and I'd love to start a little bit close to the beginning. I was watching a number of interviews getting prepared, and I think your wife, Jacqueline Novogratz, who's been on this podcast before, asked you a question at a summit once. And you were born in Pakistan to missionary parents and educated there, and I guess in England as well. In what ways did your childhood and your upbringing shape you into the person you became? I mean, they all do. But I'm just curious how that particular upbringing-

Chris Anderson:

Of course, in a way, none of us can really know the answer to that question, because there's only one journey, and I don't know what it would've looked like to have grown up any other way. But I mean, first of all, my parents, as you say, were missionaries. They were working for something bigger than they were, and that was part of our life the whole time. It was always very, very clear that God's will came first and everything else second, now that didn't preclude an extremely loving family environment. Sometimes almost too much loving, it felt like, maybe. I don't know. I feel very lucky the way I grew up, because I think growing up in another country... I mean I was born in Pakistan. I actually went to school in India in an-

Carey Nieuwhof:

In India. Nice.

Chris Anderson:

... international school that was up in the Himalayas. Spectacular nature. There's a lot of time playing outside on the mountains, collecting beetles, and going to school with people from 30 different countries. Actually I went back to the school a few years ago and said to the school then that, "You shaped my identity as a global soul." As a kid, when you grow up that way, the things that have become so important in our world of where is someone from, are they with us or are they other, those things naturally go away. And what matters is not what country someone from or what color they are. What matters is are they chasing your girlfriend or can you beat them at some sport, or whatever. Do you all like the same music? That's what matters.

And one wish, if I could have it, is I wish every kid could grow up that way with other kids from around the world, because it really does change a lot, I think. So those two things, probably the sort of naturally growing up, feeling like a global soul. And I feel more a global soul than I feel British. Although I am

British, I'm proud of it. But my number one identity there is probably is a global soul. And then two just, you can't really get it out of your head, this notion that life is about living for something bigger than you are. And I think that's an important idea.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, you said something that caught my attention. Almost too loving. And it's not always that when you grow up with Christian missionary parents or in a Christian home, the description is loving. Sometimes it can be harsh, sometimes it can be difficult. What do you mean by too loving? That's interesting.

Chris Anderson:

Well, we were sent to boarding school. So we were actually away from our parents for nine months of the year, and this was pretty much from age five, six.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Wow.

Chris Anderson:

And so some people go through that and think, "Oh, my God. That's awful. How could you possibly do that?" My parents were serving the Lord. That's hard for them as well. So when we were with them, we were possibly held too closely or I sometimes felt that it was like the intensity of their love for us was clear. But because it was crammed into a short part of the year, occasionally, that sometimes felt suffocating and I just wanted distance. But I mean, it's not a big deal. We were a loving family and I love them. I never felt they were making a bad choice by abandoning us for short periods. I thought this is who they are, this is what they want to do, this is great. And we were given a great life. The school was amazing.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So it's always interesting to figure out what you want to do with your life. Your life has a hinge point maybe 20 years ago that we'll talk about when you acquired TED. But the part of your story that I didn't know until I started diving deep for this interview is you had a very successful career in business. I'd love to go back to what drew you there. It was a computer magazine in 1984 or something that you decided to launch, which became a bit of an empire. How do you go from missionary kid, global education, something bigger than yourself, to becoming an entrepreneur?

Chris Anderson:

Right. Well, I was really lucky. When I was in Pakistan, I was there playing with kids who had nothing, and none of us had really had anything at that time. And here we are, many years later, they're probably still stuck in a village somewhere, maybe farming or if they're even still alive. I got an education and that changes everything. So I was sent to boarding school in England from age 14, and then went to Oxford, studied philosophy, and then I became a journalist, and spent a few years doing a few bits and pieces. But I then just got completely captivated by the arrival of home computers. I've always been somewhere between... I've loved language and communication, but there's a science nerd somewhere in there as well. The computers, the fact that you could have a computer in your very home that you could actually program and get it to do things, that was amazing.

And so I was addicted, and at one point, I had a chance to become editor of one of the new computer games magazines and bluff my way into that job. And then a year after that, the whole world of publishing was changing. The computers themselves changed the technology of how you could produce a publication, so that instead of having to do it as a big unionized operation with lots of people and a huge investment, three or four, or five people working from home could basically produce a magazine. You pay a printer to print it, but you could basically typeset from a computer, and then paste up these pages, and send them off to a printer and print your magazine. And so, timing is everything, and there's so much luck in that. But in after a year of working on this magazine in 1985, I decided to try and do it alone, and it was the perfect time to do it.

We started out with a single computer magazine. But then every year, there was so much happening in that space. There was so much opportunity to launch new magazines, that we just kept doubling in size every year for seven years and adding in these other magazines into the mix, any kind of craft or hobbyist magazine. My thought or the thing that drove us was that most media is quite broad, but that your best chance at connecting at a really deep level with an audience is to go narrow, and to try and tap into people's actual passions. So we produced magazines that were really boring for almost everyone, except people they were targeted at, who would run to the newsagent every month for the new issue.

Carey Nieuwhof:

You're talking like cross-stitching or whatever like [inaudible 00:13:31].

Chris Anderson:

Yeah. There was cross-stitching, there was classical music, there was mountain-biking, there was woodworking, photography, all sorts of different pieces to it. But the majority of them were tech-related in some way.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Uh-huh. And so definitely every year, there has to be a skillset there. This is something we've seen at TED too. TED was a pretty obscure conference when you acquired it in 2001, 2002. It was known in its sphere, technology, education and design, but it wasn't nearly a household name like it is today. What have been some of the keys, Chris, to the virality, I guess you could say, of your career over the decades?

Chris Anderson:

Yeah, it's an interesting question. Certainly early on, there was a strong element of luck, I would say. That particular business at that particular time could grow from its own cash flow. So not many businesses can do this, but basically, if you launched a new magazine quickly enough, if you could go from idea to printing of the first issue within three months, you would actually get revenue from a distributor before you actually had to pay the printer. And so every launch paid for itself. And that is I've discovered since. I didn't know this at the time, but that's a very, very rare for a business.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Wow.

Chris Anderson:

So we grew ourselves from our own cash flow. And as long as the ideas were good, and you had, basically, a pretty good hit rate on what you launched. You could build a business very, very quickly. In order for those ideas to be good, you just have to hire great people. And we found a way of presenting in the company as this... We were based in Bath, most of the publishers were in London. Bath is 150 miles away. It's a beautiful place, but not London. We were this rebel alliance out in the sticks that was taking on the big publishers, and there were a few people from that was a hugely appealing positioning. And so it was just great fun. We could take on the bigger publishers, move faster than they could, and pick up these audience niches, many of which they didn't really care about anyway, because they were relatively small for them. But for us, they were great. So there's some mix in there. I would say more broadly, the single biggest thing that I've looked for my whole entrepreneurial life is passion.

Not my own passion, other people's passion. If you can see that people are really excited about something, that is your clue that there is untapped growth there. And the market doesn't often pick up passion very well. You can compare two TV shows with the same viewership or two magazines with the same circulation. That tells you something, but it doesn't tell you how intensely those audiences engage with that media item. And if you have a sense that, one, there's much deeper engagement than the other. That is your clue that this is the one where there's going to be word of mouth, that people who have subscribed are going to renew, and that you can build a business from that. So when it came to TED, when I first went to TED in the late '90s, TED was an annual conference in California. 500 people went.

So it was tiny relative to the world of tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands of magazines being sold. But those 500 people, A, they were remarkable people by and large. And B, their passion for this experience was astonishing. I think my first TED, Jeff Bezos, who was not really well known then, told me this is the most important week of my year. And several people felt the same. They started their year's calendar carving this out, because it went so deeply inside them. And so that was the clue that there was really something special here that deserved to be more than just 500 people once a year. I'm trying to understand what that thing was, it took a while. I think what that thing was that most conferences are about one thing and you go deep into that thing, and it's your profession, and the notion of multidisciplinary knowledge, and how to make that interesting. Certainly back then, it wasn't often talked about or thought about.

In fact, multidisciplinary sounds boring. When I first went to TED, I was interested in what technology and publishing you'd hear from an architect or some artist, or whatever, and I think, "Why am I listening to these people?" But over the course of several days, you see that all of knowledge connects, literally all of it. It does all connect. There's one world, there's one reality. Everything that we understand about that reality sheds different light. And if you know what other people are working on and why they're passionate about it, and why they're excited about it, that, ultimately, is going to give richer context to what you are doing and it may well inspire you to go next level in some way.

So that was what was special about TED was that because it was, originally TED, it was technology, entertainment, design, people from those three industries were being brought together, and it turned out they could learn a lot from each other. But the way in which you would speak at a conference like that wasn't how you would speak at a general conference, full of jargon and so forth. You would deliberately try to make your content accessible to a broader group. And so, you're giving people tools to understand things outside their own trench.

Carey Nieuwhof:

No, that's really interesting. I see the thread more clearly now being interested in your whole magazine publishing, and things that other people were interested in. And then I imagine you saw a similar thing

at TED, it was, at first, the three disciplines. And I'm not usually grateful for the algorithm, but the YouTube algorithm spit up your vision talk when you acquired TED, when your foundation acquired TED. Yes, it did.

And so I thought, "Oh, I got to watch this." I just literally finished a course on leading change, and I've led change for 25 years, and I watched what you did. I'm sure you remember the talk well. You were seated in a chair and you explained to these owners, so to speak, these delegates that you were the new boss, you had just acquired TED. And you just spoke from the heart, because you talked about your business career and you said... I thought it was a bit of a business hero, but it really didn't go the way I thought, and then you talked about the dot-com crash and everything. I don't know. Do you remember that talk well?

Chris Anderson:

Oh, I really do.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah.

Chris Anderson:

No, that was at a moment when it wasn't clear whether the TED transition would work, because I'd bought it. But I bought it from a charismatic owner, and the general opinion among the crowd was that post Richard Wurman that Ted couldn't work, that he held it together. And so I gambled on it that there was a community there and a desire to keep it going, but this was my chance to persuade people. And up to the moment of that talk, almost no one had signed up for the next year's conference. It was stressful. So this was the talk at the end of the final conference done by the predecessor, the founder of TED. And I'm not a good public speaker. I was nervous. I often come over as awkward, so I wasn't standing up. I sat down in a chair.

I just thought that the best shot at doing this was to be vulnerable, and honest, and tell people what I really thought. And what I really thought was that the world needed this conference, that there was so many ideas only work when they come together. You need to learn about things from multiple sources. I think the example I gave there was happiness, was that to understand happiness. It's not just some folk story that you learned on your mother's knee. Neuroscience has a part to play. Religion may well have a part to play. Evolutionary biology may well have a part-

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Chris Anderson:

Religion may well have a part to play. Evolutionary biology may well have a part to play. Neuroscience, the way in which societies... There's just lots of different pieces. And if you care about your long-term happiness, which everyone does, then having a place where you can hear about these things from many ways, that really matters.

And so I think what I tell people was that, look, I thought I was great at business, turned out I'm kind of a loser. My company blew up in the dot-com crash. Horrible. I survived by turning to reading and turning to the world of ideas and discovering, to my amazement, how much had happened since I'd been at university and just how rich that world was and how much potential there. And so the thought of

immersing myself in a community that was interested in ideas, that was very exciting to me. And anyway, somehow people...

I think people were secretly dying for TED to continue because it was a big deal for them. And so I promised them that this wasn't going to be like a commercial takeover. I wasn't trying to make money from it. It was a foundation that was taking over. We were just doing it for the ideas, and please come on this journey with me. So there's so much we can learn together. And somehow that played well. And in the break after that 200 people signed up for the next year's event, and that was the moment where I knew it was actually going to work.

So yeah, I would say that 50 minutes was probably the most stressful and sort of consequential of my recent life for sure.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I think what got me was it was so vulnerable and so open. You were seated, it looked like it was unscripted. It certainly felt like it was coming straight from your heart. And you know, you did the classic British self-deprecating move, which obviously wins people over. But then-

Chris Anderson:

[inaudible 00:25:10] true Carey. What we say are basically true at heart.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, but it was so endearing and we'll link to it in the show notes. But I think if anybody particularly, and I did not realize how successful the conference was and how revered the founder was, but I can think of all the people listening to this who are in that situation going, "Oh gosh, they all want the old guy, the guy who used to lead it, the woman who used to lead it." And for you to come in with that kind of vulnerability. And then I think you had three things you're going to do, and number one was, "I'm going to change nothing," which I'm sure held for six months or a year, and then a lot changed. But it was amazing. To me, it was an example that I'm going to point to again and again of a brilliant vision talk because it was so disarming and so vulnerable. So thanks for giving us the backstory-

Chris Anderson:

I'm not sure that a lot of people have said that, by the way, but...

Carey Nieuwhof:

Did you get reaction to that? What did people say?

Chris Anderson:

There was reaction, but I think it was more the community. So Jeff, Jeff Bezos, was sitting there in the third row or second row or something like that, and he stood up. I'd built a friendship with him and so he stood up right after I finished speaking. And so you know how that works. So everyone stood up, but I think it was for Jeff, not for the talk. And it was almost like the community was saying, "Okay, we'll give this a shot." But it's like crowds, audiences talk to each other in all kinds of subtle ways during any talk. It's really any talk is kind of like a co-creation between speaker and audience. So yeah, there was great reaction to it, but I think it was more relief that TED could continue.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well let's talk about that progress because you made a couple of other decisions. I'm sure there was the first three years, you opened the speaker to a wider variety than just technology, education or design. But then in 2006, you made a real-

Chris Anderson:

[inaudible 00:27:23] technology, entertainment, design. Now I kind of wish that E was education sometimes, but it was actually entertainment.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I probably had that wrong my whole life. Thank you.

Chris Anderson:

It was the original three.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh, there you go. Entertainment design, I did not know that. Okay.

Chris Anderson:

Yeah, so it was tough in '84 where you had, here's the Apple Mac for the first time, technology. Entertainment, look at all the stuff, you can do it, elegant design. Those were sort of the three intersecting pieces. But education is what TED in many ways has become. And it's what I-

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's how I think about it. I think about it as education and I just should read the fine print at some point or the bigger font.

So what were some of the first changes you made? 2006 was a pivotal year. You decided to post talks online.

Chris Anderson:

Yeah, so I'd bought TED through using a non-profit. Despite the crash or whatever, I'd managed to put so money aside into a foundation and that was what I used to buy Ted. And so as a foundation, you can't really just have an elite conference once here. You have to try and do something for the public good. And initially our thoughts were, "Well, people are inspired there. Maybe we can encourage, we can use some of the money we make for the conference to back one of the speakers or something like that. We tried a fellows program, which has continued to this day. And we had a prize to try and get behind. We'd give the people who win the prize a wish, any wish, and we'll try and make a wish come true. So we were trying to do things like that.

But the real opportunity for TED was to try to get the talks more seen. So we started trying to persuade television companies to put them on air and do some kind of TED program. Met with universal shaking of heads and it's like-

Carey Nieuwhof:

Really, so you went to the networks?

Chris Anderson:

Yeah, yeah. I don't know how to put this to you, but talking heads are really boring. I mean lectures, "You think you could have a successful television program based on lectures?" We got nowhere, we had gotten nowhere.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's awesome. So that didn't work.

Chris Anderson:

Yeah. And then this little miracle called online video started to happen. And I don't know if you remember back in 2006, it was pretty... First of all, it didn't work very well in most circumstances. Often you'd have your laptop open and there in the corner, you'd have a little screen and it'd be sort of pixelated and you'd see little kittens doing silly tricks or whatever, early YouTube stuff.

Carey Nieuwhof:

A lot of buffering.

Chris Anderson:

A lot of buffering. As an experiment, we decided to put six talks out as a sort of video podcast thing and not really knowing how well the inspiration and the impact of them would actually translate onto a computer screen versus being in the room. It wasn't clear it would work. And so the amazing thing that happened was people responded to them, they went viral. We started to receive emails from people. That showed me that there was passion being unlocked, people were being touched at a deep level. People would say, "I am looking at my computer screen and tears are running down my face."

Carey Nieuwhof:

Wow.

Chris Anderson:

And I was like, "Whoa." Or people would say, "I have just had the most meaningful conversation with my daughter that I've had in 10 years. Thank you for that talk. And I was looking at these, jaw agape, saying, "Okay, well that's it. We have no choice. We have to put content out." So there was a conscious decision then to flip to being not mainly a conference, but mainly a distribution of these ideas in talk form.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Was it still one annual event in Monterey at that time or had you expanded-

Chris Anderson:

It was.

Carey Nieuwhof:

... a little bit beyond that? Still? So the single one year multi-day event?

Chris Anderson:

Yeah, I think we might have by then had one TED in Oxford, England at a sort of TED Global. We were just starting doing that as well. Yeah, it was basically the single conference is what drove almost everything. And the risk was that if you gave away the content, would anyone still come to the conference? And so we definitely got pushback from people on it and it felt... it was probably a risk. But we listened to some of the TED talks that were doing the rounds back then that were talking about how on the internet, information wanted to be free, about how there were all these examples of the amazingness that could happen when you gave people a chance to cooperate together and so forth, and decided it was worth the risk.

And of course the amazing thing that happened is that far from reducing demand for the conference, it actually massively increased it because these talks spread around the world and we suddenly got deluged with people wanting to help. I mean, the religious person in me, if you like, was almost, "Give something away and be amazed at what comes back." It's an idea that's actually in every religion. I actually think it's wired into humans generally, that people reciprocate generosity. Giving away these talks was perceived by people as generous, and they wanted to do stuff with them. They wanted to share them, they wanted to translate them. And so we were stunned by the response. And yes, it changed what TED is.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, you've written a number of books, one of which obviously TED Talks, probably the one you're best known for and we'll get there. But did you write a book, it was really hard to verify, because there's a French version on amazon.com, there's a Blinkist which attributes it to you. Did you write a book called Free maybe in 2009? Was That actually you?

Chris Anderson:

Okay. So I'm very happy to clear up this confusion. So there are two Chris Andersons. And I'm not that one. There is a brilliant Chris Anderson, he's a friend actually, and he's spoken at Ted. But he's the ex-editor of Wired Magazine.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Okay, got you.

Chris Anderson:

He wrote Free and a couple of other brilliant books on the internet. So if you want to terminate this podcast right now, Carey and go and get the real Chris Anderson, I welcome you to do it. Because he's-

Carey Nieuwhof:

We'll keep going.

Chris Anderson:

... very, very, interesting.

Carey Nieuwhof:

He made the same point in that book because the actual book left in publication is in French, and I studied it in elementary school but cannot read a book in it. So I found a Blinkist on it. I subscribe to that and I'm like, "That's exactly..." He wrote about what you were just talking about, which is-

Chris Anderson:

Exactly. This is the whole... There was so much excitement about the internet in those aughts. There was a real belief that it was bringing the world together and that it changed everything. It made so many things possible. And one of the things that was clear was that all the rules around what you give away and what you keep were changing and that there was actually huge power to giving things away. And I think that still applies to the internet today, and I've been thinking about that aspect a lot. In many ways, it drove everything that we did at TED, was to try to, honestly... And I think it's actually the best single strategic question that anyone who has any kind of online presence should and could ask, "What is the most radical thing I can give away? What could I give away that would stun people that they could really value and use?"

Because if you can get a good answer to that question, you may be amazed at what comes back. I mean, in a way, Carey, your whole work, it's all based on giving away amazing content and people... That grows you an audience, a growing audience, and people talk about you and want to do more. And it's like, yes, there are ways of getting podcast funded and making it profitable and so forth. But even just as a generosity model, there's a lot of power there.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I think there is. This is the kind of conversation, I'm taking notes while we're talking, that I always had always hoped to have with you. And the fact that it isn't in a green room somewhere at an event or over a coffee shop and there are microphones and tens of thousands of leaders will be able to listen to it, that actually makes me really happy, which is a cool thing.

And yet I'm going to go here, and feel free to divert if you want to divert, but I think you got enough church in you to answer this question, growing up with missionary parents. Chris, believe it or not, there's an active debate happening right now at the end of 2022 about church leaders who are still debating whether they should put their services online, whether they should offer their content for free. And it's a competitive mindset about, well, if I put it out there on the internet, people aren't going to show up in person. What are your thoughts on that? Do you have any advice for leaders who are in that? Because the whole business model thing we've been able to figure out, but it is paradoxical and totally different from the way, quote, business has been done for years.

Chris Anderson:

The first thing I'll say is none of this is intuitive. That often it's the counterintuitive thing is the right answer. I think if you... and every situation is different. I was definitely recommending that people give away everything that they've got without thought to it, and how you do it matters. For example, if... I mean, why are people coming to church? Are they really coming to listen to the sermon live? My guess is that the main reason people are coming to church is the same reason why they come to TED. They're really coming there for a sense of community for each other and they put up with the sermon as much as... in many cases.

Carey Nieuwhof:

True there.

Chris Anderson:

And they come because it's what they do. They're church goers and this is their community.

But beyond that, I would say how confident are you in what you are saying? Do you think that the words you have can change someone, can move them, can inspire them, can nudge them to be a better human, can help them understand the world better in some way? If so, why on earth wouldn't you want that to be out there to a wider audience? If you do it the right way, it's likely to be absolutely the best way of recruiting people, not losing them. So I mean, that was definitely our experience. So it feels to me like that's a defensive mindset that is probably off.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, I would definitely be with you in that answer. I think an abundance mindset always gets you a lot further than a scarcity mindset. I am curious though, what is, and I know it's a non-for-profit, non-profit foundation that runs TED, the Sapling Foundation. What is revenue model for TED? How is it funded?

Chris Anderson:

So the main revenue source for a long time was conference fees. The conference is expensive and people who come really end up funding a lot of else of what TED has done. As more people have come, we've been able to dream of other programs like building a website where you can give away all these talks for free. But there's other revenue from online sponsors of the talks. We have other services that we offer. We offer training for companies that we get some revenue from, and we get some philanthropy as well. I think that's probably going to be a growing part of TED. Obviously during the pandemic, our finances were hit quite badly and we've bled quite a bit the last few years and we're in the process of sort of fighting our way back. And we had an amazing conference again in Vancouver in April. But that's at the heart of it is those main events that by themselves are, I mean, you could critique them as elitist if you wanted to, except that we bring in a bunch of people on scholarships and make all the content free to the world.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Literally anybody with an internet connection can see what happened in Vancouver.

Chris Anderson:

And we've also given away our brand Carey, which turned was another thing that turned out to be amazingly and surprisingly, effective.

Carey Nieuwhof:

2009, TEDx?

Chris Anderson:

Yeah. People wanted us to come and do TED in different parts of the world and we didn't have the resources to do it. So we said, "Well, radical generosity, what does that look like? That looks like giving away our brand. You can do it. You have a TED event, you can put an asterisk on it, called an X, TEDx." Turns out that asterisk came to mean TED multiplied because what people did with it locally was astonishing. And we've ended up with three... There are 3,000 curatorial teams around the world now who put on an event. I mean the pandemic hit it, but pretty much annually they create 25,000 videos that are posted on YouTube annually and they account for about a billion views annually. So that whole enterprise is overseen by about 20 people in New York. There's no other way that you could build a media operation of that sort of scale of a billion views, 25,000 videos, whatever, with 20 people.

But you can if you give things away and let other people own it. They do the work, they take the risk. There's literally, in addition to these 20 people, there are probably 60,000 volunteers around the world spending significant amounts of their time, undergoing some financial stress to get their events sponsored. They're doing all of the actual work, unpaid. We don't charge them. It's a beautiful gift economy thing that's going on there where everyone is giving something and helping out. Our brand helps them get the audiences that they need and the speakers they want. But what we get back is breathtaking.

And so I get it. I just think that it's another example of how if you are bolder in what you give away, you can be absolutely amazed at what happens.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah. So there's no revenue model associated with TEDx. It's just like, "Here's the formula, do it."?

Chris Anderson:

The licenses are free. The videos that come back that are posted on our channel, the advertising that YouTube sells on that, we do get a share of that. So we do actually get some revenue. That in itself doesn't cover the full cost of the licensing operation that we have, but it goes somewhere towards it. But mainly the events themselves are all locally sponsored. They all have their own local business model. I think anyone who's thinking about doing this, think about rules and tools. They both really matter.

You have to have rules if you're going to give away something like your brand, and how can it be used, what are our values? What doesn't count? What must you do, what must you not do? We don't like people to have talks, for example, on politics, religion, or pseudoscience, because those are recipes for people getting angry with each other at some point, they can be. But what's much more important is the tools that we have, which are here is how to put on a good event. Here's how to recruit and train speakers. Here's how to record them well, et cetera. And what happens when you've got 3000 people doing that is that they start teaching each other. They learn from each other. So you have this sort of self-improving system that's a wonder to behold.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I have a friend who spoke at TEDx in Toronto earlier this year, and she said the process was so rigorous, even at a TEDx event. And her talk went on to have over a million views four months in or whatever, which is incredible.

Chris Anderson:

Wow, that's great. I will-

Carey Nieuwhof:

Dr. Karen Gordon, she did a great job.

Chris Anderson:

Yeah, some of the very best talks we've got on the platform are from TEDx events. So Brené Brown-

Carey Nieuwhof:

Do you choose? You select what you feature on the TED platform from TEDx?

Chris Anderson:

Yes.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Gotcha. Yeah, yeah. So that's a decision.

No, that makes sense because you protect the brand. You wouldn't want a TEDx event to be cultish or bizarre or some kind of radical fringe movement thing.

On the other hand, you also have enough freedom to say and "go ahead and do it". Boy, this is passion. And seeing the passion in others and releasing the passion in others, that's a theme I didn't expect preparing for this, but it's really, really compelling.

Okay, so we have to talk about TED Talks. And let me ask you this very basic question, I'm sure you've been asked a thousand times, but what makes an idea worth spreading, in your view?

PART 2 OF 4 ENDS [00:46:04]

Chris Anderson:

There are so many things that can make an idea worth spreading. I guess I divide them into two categories. I mean, first of all, I'd say that ideas in general are what have built civilization. We would be another species of ape were it not for the fact that we can share ideas and it's those that build culture, ideas outlive their originators and they build on each other. And so all of human culture really is an edifice of ideas that just get more and more powerful.

The two main categories of idea, I think, that it's probably worth pointing to is ideas can help you understand the world in a new way. So it's just a reshuffling, if you like, of how you are putting the pieces together. And I hadn't understood that you could think of creativity in this way before and that it plays that role.

So there's insights that you can get just from a better understanding of the world. But I think the bigger piece, and the miracle of ideas really, is that ideas allow us to reshuffle the future. We can try out lots of different futures in our minds and pick the one we like. Dan Gilbert, the TED speaker said, "Our brains are these simulators. They can somehow, in this gooey three pound mass of gray goo, they can paint a picture of what could be." So I think the most powerful ideas are people who say, "This is what could be. We've got a problem here, we know about this, this and this but what if... Let me tell you, let me show you what that thing could look like." And that vision may well draw, if it's painted the right way, may well draw other people to it and when enough people are drawn to it, you can go.

Of course this goes back, this is part of all human history. "Here is the promised land. It's flowing with milk and honey. Doesn't that sound good? I know... Let's go there. It may take us 40 years but it's worth it." So it's incredible that humans can do this and that we can present an idea that will pull people along. So I'd say that's the biggest thing, that picture of the future.

And there's one other key thing I'll say, it's that every idea that is a powerful idea reshapes what's been termed the adjacent possible. So at any one moment it's possible to dream of certain things but if you are in the year 1700 you can't dream of, "Oh, I could create a streaming video show." That's not a thing that could be imagined then. It takes all these building blocks to be in place before you can imagine that. Some of the big things like the Gutenberg printing press created this vast set of new adjacent possibilities. Suddenly anyone with something big to say could say it and reach thousands or millions of people with it in writing. Now we have the internet that is just the most incredible expansion of the

adjacent possible because it allows you and me to sit down where we're nowhere near each other but we can talk and have a conversation that many other people can hear. And as a result of this conversation, who knows, maybe there's some little spark goes off in someone's mind that creates something.

So ideas are constantly, certainly every technology, but ideas in general are constantly shape-shifting what the adjacent possible looks like. And that's what makes them so exciting because it literally allows you to... The more ideas you're exposed to, the more you can dream about your own future or the role that you could play.

And that, in fact, is the single most, I would say, satisfying aspect to me of what TED talks do is that they shift people sometimes from being spectators to being agents. "The future is not just this thing that is going to hit me like a train or not and that I can be frightened of or moan about or whatever, the future isn't written yet and I'm going to be one of the people writing it so I better get started. I'm going to be an agent." And that, I think, is a very healthy and beautiful attitude and that's how better futures get made.

Carey Nieuwhof:

In your book called TED Talks, you've got a section on mistakes that communicators make and it was amusing. I could empathize with the fact that you're sitting in the front row at some TED events going, "Oh my gosh, how is this happening on our stage? We prepped this person." You had that more than once, Chris.

Chris Anderson:

Yes.

Carey Nieuwhof:

We got lots of communicators listening to this right now and some of them, I'm sure, want to give a TED talk one day. So what are some, like, "Oh, please don't do that," things in a talk that you think are dealbreakers?

Chris Anderson:

I think the single worst thing is that people come in viewing this as "This is an opportunity for me to promote myself, my cause, my company, my organization." Wrong start point. People see through that and it often is a turnoff. I think come planning to be generous, come planning to give to a group of people the single most beautiful gift you could give them, which is an idea. You've got something in your head that could literally rewire their brains and they could be benefiting from days, months, or years from now. Now, that is an incredible thing. And so I think it's start with, "What do I have that this audience could really be excited by and could make a difference to them?"

So that's the healthy start point and so that means, for example, that... I think the worst thing that often happens at TED is that people think of TED as, "Oh, it's this place where they give these inspiring talks. I'm going to come on and be the inspirer." And they use the surface tools of it, of inspiration, standing on stage, arms aloft, eyes aglow, looking out at people, speaking expansively and telling some grandiose story about themselves, whatever. That's not really what inspires. Inspiration comes from, usually, from humility, from courage, from authenticity, from sharing something that is real and that is actually valuable to the audience.

So I'd just say start by planning to bring a gift. The gift is the idea. What is that idea? And give the talk in service of that idea. Where a lot of talks go wrong is that they kind of ramble in some way. They have a lot of interesting little sub-elements or whatever but there's no clear through line. And so I think if there's one key thing that you want to communicate, figure out how you make that through line of the talk and then the rest of the pieces slot in fairly quickly. You might want to start out by making people curious about that through line, that question, it's a question or maybe it's an endearing initial story or whatever, you need to open people up initially and build some kind of connection and give them a reason to care about the next 15 minutes. But let everything illuminate some aspect of that.

So, say the through line in this is you're trying to solve a particular problem. You'll start by showing people what the problem is and why it's an issue and how you came across it and how it moved you and why it's a difficult problem to solve. And you maybe take people down a couple of dead ends and say, "You might think this would be a way you could do this. We tried this, it was disastrous, it really didn't work."

And so I think the single biggest mistake that a lot of people make, certainly when they come to TED first time, is they say, "I've got this body of work. I cover so many things. I've got to share people something of all of that whole body of work." And so what they then do is go into summary mode and they say, "So I believe in podcasting and I think it's really important to get good information from people, but I also believe in preaching and so I do that and then I do..." That sort of giving someone a resume is really boring, it's really boring.

So usually the advice is, "Say less. Pick one thing but go deeper into that one thing, develop it, show it in a way that makes people curious and makes them laugh and take people on a curiosity journey that has a satisfying outcome."

And having said that, Carey, every talk is different. There can't be a formula. Sometimes people come thinking they know what the formula is and it comes over just as clichéd and you don't want that.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well there are books that claim that they have the TED talk formula but I read yours instead.

Chris Anderson:

I mean something can be a formula for about a month but then it becomes clichéd and boring. So what matters is to find the way in which you, uniquely, can connect with this audience uniquely.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's true.

Chris Anderson:

It's different in every case, honestly.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Even if you sample the top 10 talks, the most watched TED talks, they're all different. And some of them are quirky and some of them are... Well, they're all brilliant in one way or the other but you're like, "Oh, that's interesting." Different things resonate.

Chris Anderson:

Correct.

Carey Nieuwhof:

One of the things you revolutionized was the time of a talk, 18 minutes tops. You can have Elon Musk, he doesn't get extra time or whoever.

Chris Anderson:

I think he actually does, or did.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh, he does. Elon does. Picked the wrong example. Well, you did a brilliant interview, couple of them, with him, one on film and one live and you've done a bunch over the years.

Chris Anderson:

Yeah, and I'm afraid they were longer than 18. I mean, look, the 18-minute thing, where that came from. First of all, when I took over TED, it was officially 15 minutes but speakers interpreted that as 20 or 25. So I said 18 just to anchor it precisely and speakers interpret that as 18, 19 or 20. But the truth is, because you are trying to communicate to people outside your own area of knowledge, usually it behooves you to be short and to express things in a way that is accessible because people want to know outside, they want these messages from outsiders. But, I don't know, it is hard to listen for longer than about 18 or 20 minutes unless you are really into it.

There is absolutely a place for 45-minute, one-hour long, two-hour long talks, I dare say. In the right circumstances those are great and I think we're open to actually having longer talks on our platform from time to time but, by and large, the discipline to give people is, "Go shorter and think about every word." And really we're in an attention war, people don't have a lot of time and so your best shot is to go pretty short and use that time really well.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, and I got to ask this question because I wouldn't be fair to my audience if I didn't, but there is a long debate in the church about length of sermons and the preacher always wants more time and other people say less time. How would you weigh in on that? Because I've heard the argument made, "Oh you should do 18-minute sermons, just like TED talks." I agree with you, I think there are some communicators who can hold court for an hour but, unfortunately, I know a lot of people who think they can hold court for a lot longer than they can.

Chris Anderson:

Yeah, I think it'd be a good exercise to have someone ask people in the congregation anonymously whether they think the current sermons could be a bit shorter. I would definitely bet money that if they're currently running at 40 minutes, I would bet that most people actually would prefer shorter. I mean, look, there are moments when you can but, I mean, there's also a trap that every speaker falls into which is that they love the sound of their own voice. So I would definitely lean towards... Say a service is an hour, right, which might be, again, the limits of most people, what they can comfortably commit to every single Sunday or depending on your religion, what is the best time in that hour? And it's a community. How do you bring in other people in the community? Could you not have a format where you invite people in the community? Like, "What is your piece of knowledge, your insight, that you've

learned? Is there something you could share?" Obviously music plays such a crucial role but storytelling from the community, I think, could be very, very binding and so forth.

Having said that, I'm no longer... I don't go to church now and I wouldn't describe myself as a religious person but I think religions have figured out a lot of things that show real insight into how human psychology works and what we need. The fact that people come together once a week to be reminded that there is something bigger than them, to be reminded of awe and wonder and love and to be nudged to be their better selves, that is an extraordinary public service, I would say.

I really worry that the secular world hasn't found an alternative to that and I fear that there are probably consequences to that because people are a mix, right? I personally think there's goodness in everyone. I think there are circumstances when all of us can be a little bit evil and whether that's because angels and devils are battling out within your mind or whether it's because of just different elements of human psychology, it is real, that is real. And we don't spend nearly enough time figuring out how to empower the better parts of ourselves.

Religious practice has, by default, done that, I think quite powerfully in many circumstances, and I really think it's a challenge to the secular world to get its act together and figure out how to do some of that because, I mean, well, you're looking at a world right now where oftentimes people are not very nice to each other and it's dangerous, it's scary.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well it's interesting, and thank you for raising that, Chris, because I think about this quite a bit and if you look at what's happening in the secular world it's like a lot of the religious categories haven't disappeared. Cancel culture is all about shame and honor and sin and justice and all of those things, I'm not sure meted out in the best possible way that we can as human beings. But it's almost like the theological categories that you were raised in, that Christians are raised in, they don't disappear from the culture but they almost become misused blunt instruments. Now, that said, they've also been used as blunt instruments in the church too. Just read a little bit of church history or talk to enough people and it's not like Christians use them perfectly. But I think you raise a really good point. I mean, what are your thoughts on that? What does the secular culture do without the church's good influence?

Chris Anderson:

I think it's an unsolved problem. There's a TED talk that Alain de Botton, the philosopher, gave at TED. It was called Atheism 2.0 and he was basically saying, "Look, I'm an atheist and many of you in the audience are, whatever, but we should not ignore what centuries of religious practice have brought to the world. We should be incredibly careful before discarding that." And one of the points he made was this sort of pattern of weekly pulling people together and nudging. He also said, "Things like art, the art that religions have inspired, the community that they have inspired, these things matter a lot." And so there was an atheist there warning that the secular world is not doing what it should or could be doing.

So I don't know, I personally think that there's a lot that could and should be done in that space. I mean, there's plenty of... You have secular organizations that understand the power of regular meeting, for example. There's the wonderful organization that's CreativeMornings where creative people come together every Tuesday. Alcoholics Anonymous brings together people regularly. There's lots. We may need this kind of nourishing. And a world in which we are apart from each other, tapping rude text messages to each other on social media is not healthy, honestly.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Is there anything in your Christian upbringing that you miss?

Chris Anderson:

Yeah, certainty. The belief that here is a worldview, we live on this Earth, we then go to another place. There's a comfort to that. The expression of it that meant most to me when I was growing up was through C.S. Lewis. I thought his big picture painting that you could view Christianity in the context of this sort of inspiring mythology was powerful. And I think definitely the sense of having a community of people committed to wanting to behave ethically. Now, what I was puzzled about, was surprised by, as I gradually got exposed to more people outside the church was how many people outside the church actually are also committed to that. And it was a puzzle to me. It's like, why on earth would someone want to behave ethically if they didn't have to? It takes effort. Why not just be selfish, for goodness' sake?

But it turns out that generosity and a desire to do good and so forth, it's an important part of human nature, I think. And whether it was put there by God or by evolution, it is a part of human nature and lots of people feel it and express it. And that was thrilling to discover and it was actually one of the reasons why I gave myself permission to let go. But I haven't, how can I say, I'm not a confident, certain atheist in the scope of someone like a Richard Dawkins or whatever. I think there's so much mystery to the world. I think there's lots of clues and evidence of, indeed, like it's an intentional creator of the universe. There are lots of possibilities there, but beyond the God I was brought up to believe in, that intrigue me. And I'm not really talking about other religions but just that, I mean, everything going as far as a bunch of people want to make the philosophical argument that we're living in a simulation, well, that sounds silly but, if you believe that, you believe in a creator, it's just that they are...

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's true.

Chris Anderson:

You know, it was he, she, they-

PART 3 OF 4 ENDS [01:09:04]

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's true.

Chris Anderson:

But it was a he, she, they. Who was it? Who knows? And what was their intention? But if you go there, you could imagine a lot of possibilities. And I like to think of ... To me, if there was a creator, the most likely thing is not that they had a detailed plan for every single thing that happened, because the way things have worked out, that is a pretty sick plan in many ways. I like to think of a creator as almost like a courageous, edgy artist who wanted to build something that would itself create and create things that would amaze it or them or he or she, and that they were willing to take an incredible risk that you could have horrifying things like suffering at an extraordinary scale and so forth. But you might be able to create a world that would blow you away and that would have things happen that you never planned.

And it's intriguing to me that that idea is never really talked about or thought about. But to me, it's quite an exciting idea, that God itself would be stunned at the amazingness of the Amazon Forest and the

intricate web of life that is in there and the incredible richness of what is there, that that wasn't a novel that was written where, "Okay, we're going to have this spotted frog and this thing. What we're going to do is we're going to make a system that can evolve and create variety and wonder, and everyone will be blown away by it."

Carey Nieuwhof:

Hm.

Chris Anderson:

I'm excited by that idea more than the idea that the world with all its evils and horrors was written verse by verse, word by word. To me, I can't get past that. And that was the single biggest reason why I think I left, was the notion that-

Carey Nieuwhof:

Really?

Chris Anderson:

... it's all a plan. Our only job is to understand our part in the plan. To me, that's lessening what humans are capable of. But I don't want to upset any of your listeners, Carey, so I'm-

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh, you're not upsetting listeners. No.

Chris Anderson:

[inaudible 01:11:30]. But it's-

Carey Nieuwhof:

See, that's really intriguing, because it strikes me, Chris. And again, I'm not a theologian, but there are theologians within what I would loosely call Orthodox Christianity, who, I think, posit that view. It was Irenaeus who said, "The glory of God is man fully alive, humankind fully alive," which is interesting. How do you glorify God, right? It's a really good question.

I saw a concert from a favorite artist a few years ago, and this is a guy who doesn't do it for the money. It was John Mayer, actually. There are John Mayer fans, people who don't like him, people who like him. When you see that guy perform live, he leaves nothing behind. He's just all in there. And I don't think he's a person of faith. I don't know. But I'm like, "There's the glory of God in that performance," artists being artists and musicians being musicians and speakers being speakers and thinkers thinking. I don't know.

Chris Anderson:

What's that mean? Anyone who is excited by a world of wonder and just the mystery of the universe, that is something which I am in awe of and I think to my dying day will be something that I'm just dying to understand more, about who are we, how did this happen, what is this for. And those things to me are so much richer and deeper and more inspiring than the typical way that the human journey is described.

And most people maybe don't even have time to think about these things. It's about survival. It's about trying to scratch out a living and look after your family. And if you do that, that's enough. And probably that traditionally, for a lot of human history and for a lot of lives, that has been all there's been time or energy for.

But we are in a world of, compared with history, a world of astonishing abundance. We do have time to ask a lot of these other questions. And it's an amazing time to be alive. It really is. It's an amazing time to be alive. And you see creativity, whether it's in nature or just human creativity, it's flourishing on an amazing scale. Artificial intelligence is allowing, I think, a whole new next level of creativity to flourish.

And when I think about the future that way, I can get very excited about the future despite all the troubles that we face.

Chris Anderson:

I love that. You do have a lot of church leaders listening. So if you could give them a message, it's a fear for people like me, for people like myself, you would say, "Try thinking about this or doing this a little more," what message, what advice, counsel would you give to church leaders listening?

Carey Nieuwhof:

It's hard. Making the faith relevant to the modern world is crucial, I think. When religions were created, people didn't know that the earth was just one of literally trillions of planets and that you've got this huge, vast universe out there. They didn't know about the incredible power of evolution to create wonderful, breathtaking things. They didn't know about a world of rich culture, where people outside the church are capable of extraordinary acts of human goodness and heroism.

So I think finding the way to celebrate those things, and I know that many Christian leaders already do a wonderful job of that. The traditional story I was brought up with of all that matters is your declaration of faith, that determines whether you're tortured for eternity or in bliss for eternity and so forth, that whole story is hard to make relevant and plausible, I think, for someone who's immersed in the modern culture.

But many other things are highly important still to anyone, certainly just how wonderful the world is. That's something that can be celebrated, how important it is to live for people who aren't you and for people and ideas that are bigger than you are. The whole thing of who is your neighbor and what are you willing to give to that neighbor, that's an important and inspiring message.

And so I think there's a lot. And I think there's also power in saying that there's mystery in life, there's a lot that we don't know. And we don't have to know everything to...

So, yeah, wonder, humility, and the call to the bigger life, the life that is way beyond just shopping and video games or whatever. But I think there's a lot of power there for people to inspire and to build community. The psychological research suggests that people who are part of religious communities are, on balance, happier than those who aren't. People want meaning in their life, they want to know that they're part of a community, and I think they want to care beyond themselves. So there is a lot to build on there.

It really is, Chris. Thank you for weighing in on that. I really appreciate it. And the wonder in the Psalms or Jesus turning to outsiders again and again, if you look at his ministry, that's basically what he did. And those are really good correctives and reminders that we need in the church.

Okay. Couple of quick questions, and then we're getting very, very close to time. Your diverse interests really amaze me. At this stage in life, you could easily hang things up, but you're doing the opposite. You

are interested in... I think you did a vegan trial. You're very passionate about climate change. You've invested in electric flying boats, which as a boater, I'm very interested in. And you do some of the best interviews. I was sad when you handed over the TED interview to your successor, because I loved your conversations that you would have. He's doing a great job. But what fuels your curiosity at this stage of life?

Chris Anderson:

Curiosity fuels itself. It's an amazing thing about the world. The more we know... The way to think about the world is we're in this bubble of tentative knowledge, and we learn something and it pushes out into the unknown. But what that's doing is creating the surface area of what's still unknown is bigger. So every interesting question, even when it gets partially answered, leads to another question.

Yeah, I guess right now I've definitely got interested in the climate question. I think, on the one hand, it's a terrifying problem. But I also do see now my whole stance is to take the optimistic stance, meaning not I know it will be okay, but that when you see problems, we're human beings, so we respond to them. There is a pathway forward if enough of us can agree on it.

So I've got excited about potential solutions to climate change. And yeah, I have tried to support, do a bit of investing in and support companies that I think could play a role. So decarbonizing ocean transport is one area. And, yeah, that electric foiling boat company, that is one clever solution whereby a boat popping up on an electric foil, you reduce friction by 75%. And so it makes it possible to be powered by an electric battery instead of by fossil fuels.

And there's many other technologies. There's new generation sails and haul lubrication and new batteries and all sorts that could help take marine transport along the journey that cars are currently going. And in general, I think that there's a sea change in business right now. And I think there probably is a pathway to really eliminating most of our emissions just about in time to avoid the absolute worst things. There's no question it's going to be terrible weather events, like the one we're seeing right now in Florida as we record this.

But humans, what's amazing about humans is that they see things, they think, they talk to each other, and they figure out a pathway forward. And I believe that that can happen. And so getting involved in that can be just very, very engaging.

And the other thing I'm doing, I'm thinking a lot about this idea of infectious generosity and the role that it could play in rescuing the internet. I hate what the internet is doing right now. It's driving us apart. Generosity is in us and we reciprocate. And if we expressed generosity and talked about it the right way, that could go viral online and change how we think of each other.

So I've been thinking about that and planning to write a book about that, republished next year.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I love that.

Chris Anderson:

But I'm such a lucky person, Carey. I ended up in this dream job of getting exposure to some amazing minds and having conversations like this one. So...

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, I had high expectations, and it has greatly exceeded all of them. I got to ask you this question. People ask me this. About 500 episodes into the podcast, you've had thousands of TED talks. Is there a favorite talk or two that you would point people to? I know that's choosing. Feel free to reject the question. Choosing between your children, who's your favorite child?

Chris Anderson:

There are so many. If you wanted a talk that just is really fun to watch and will make you think, Tim Urban's talk on procrastination is a pretty beautifully crafted talk.

My personal favorite, and I said I had this nerdy side, there's a physicist/philosopher called David Deutsch who has a talk. Well, he talks about just the importance of knowledge in the universe. So this is a physicist saying that knowledge is as important a force in the universe, may be more important than gravity or electromagnetism and so forth. And I find his... So he describes, he says that the way to think about the history of the universe is that you had the Big Bang and there was an interesting few hundred thousand years when galaxies and so forth were created. You then had several billion years of just the era of boring where big things pushed around little things, and that was it.

And then something amazing happened. Little things started to push around big things on one planet that we know very well. This little molecule called DNA started resculpting the entire planet's surface, a surface that was 10 to the 40 times bigger than the molecule. It did so because it contained knowledge. That molecule contained knowledge that could replicate and grow.

And human knowledge is of a whole area more powerful again and can potentially redirect the resources not just of an entire planet, but of a solar system or even, in theory, a galaxy. And so what's really interesting about that is that he's arguing against what is a traditional scientific view, which is that we are, as Stephen Hawking put it, chemical scum on the surface of a random planet. Not so. We actually have something that is of... This could be the most significant and interesting place in the entire universe. So that's a very compelling argument, and it inspires me and makes me think about what we do with that knowledge. It really matters. It really, really matters.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Chris, I can't thank you enough for the time that you've invested in us today. Thank you. Obviously, TED.com, and if people want to track with you, you're pretty active on Twitter. Where else are you active these days?

Chris Anderson:

No. I guess if I get around publishing this book, I'll be a bit more active in general. But for now, yeah, just come to TED.com and pick a TED Talk that you like. Yeah, I'm at TEDchris on Twitter, but TED.com is the place to go probably.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Thank you so much.

Thanks, Carey. Great talking to you. Great questions. Take care.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Man, I love that conversation. And so thankful to Chris not only for his work, but for his transparency. And man, I love having conversations like that. If you want more, you can head on over to the show

notes. It's at CareyNieuwhof.com/episode544. We've also got transcripts there for you. And we want to thank our partners before I tell you who's coming up and also something else I've got for free that I'm very excited about.

Let me make sure that you have headed over to SuccessionToolkit.com. You can get some value packed training, which includes a super practical salary negotiation kit for free, by going to SuccessionToolkit.com. Everybody eventually changes jobs. And if that's you this year or you've been through that recently or you're planning on it, check it out.

And also, Super Bowl's going to be a really big day. Go to HeGetsUsPartners.com/fans. Get your free resources and join the over 15,000 churches who are part of this movement.

Well, next episode, Annie F. Downs is back and we talk all things about platform growth and building the gigantic empire she's building, the That Sounds Fun network and group of companies. Here's an excerpt.

Annie F. Downs:

So when I even think about building companies, Carey, the reason we're building these is not to get rich financially, but to get rich with influence, because that's what... We need the money to move the machine, of course, of course.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, yeah.

Annie F. Downs:

And we're thankful for all the ways.

Carey Nieuwhof:

[inaudible 01:26:56].

Annie F. Downs:

Yeah, that's... And the people, right? I want to make more money because I want more people to be sitting in here, because I want to have more influence. So that is my favorite currency, is influence. When I'm thinking about what we're building, when I'm thinking about what it's costing us, time is the one I worry about the most. Are our people working over hours? Am I working too many hours? Are we not using our time well? So time is the currency I worry about. Influence is the currency I pursue. Money is the one we just have to meet.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And you guys know if you subscribe for free, you will get that automatically. And if you're a new listener, we get a lot of new listeners in January, thank you so much for tuning in and trusting us with that. And if you'll subscribe wherever you listen to a podcast and maybe leave a rating and review, we'd be so grateful.

Also, coming up this month, Mark Sayers, Tim Keller, Bill McKendry about the making of the He Gets Us Super Bowl ads, Andy and Sandra Stanley. Who else have we got coming up? We've got John Mark Comer, John Lee Dumas, Gretchen Rubin, Nathan Finochio, Mark Patterson, JP Pokluda, and a whole lot more. That's all coming up on the podcast.

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And one final thing before we go, and this one's free, I would love for you to check out my brand new newsletter. I started a newsletter called the On the Rise Newsletter. You can subscribe for free at OntheRiseNewsletter.com. And what it is is a short email in your inbox every Friday that outlines some of the best stuff I've found on the internet, including some of the best books I'm reading best shows I've watched, some of the most interesting ideas that are captivating my mind, best articles I've read, best videos I've seen. Think of it as a way to be introduced to new material or do some deeper research in areas, maybe for a sermon you're working on or a piece of writing you're working on or just out of general interest. It's going to be a curious mix, kind of like this podcast. And I promise you I'm spending a lot of time on it, as is my team, and it's free. So go to OntheRiseNewsletter.com. Would love to see you over there.

Thank you so much for listening, and I hope our time together today helped you identify and break a growth barrier you're facing. We'll catch you next time.

PART 4 OF 4 ENDS [01:29:12]